

Caving in Virginia and the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic

Virginia Cave Board, October 20, 2021

The Virginia Cave Board encourages treating caving as an indoor activity at higher risk for the spread of coronavirus, and recommends following the current CDC and Virginia Department of Health guidelines for higher risk activity.

The Virginia Department of Health lists the following as higher risk activities:

- Indoor gatherings in small, poorly-ventilated spaces.
- Activities that increase respiration, such as singing, shouting/cheering, or exercising.

(<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/schools-workplaces-community-locations/social-gatherings/>):

Further details and updates on current state orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic may be found at <https://www.virginia.gov/coronavirus/>.

Please keep in mind:

1) Caving is a group activity that takes often place in an enclosed, poorly ventilated space and is in many cases difficult to undertake while complying with current social distancing recommendations. People caving together are likely to come into close contact with each other in a confined space, and getting to caves may require significant travel and interaction with other members of the public, especially landowners.

2) In addition to concerns over spread of SARS CoV 2 within the human population, scientists are currently investigating the potential for the virus to be transmitted from humans to bats or other wildlife likely to be encountered in caves. USGS scientists place the risk of transmission to bats as low, but the consequences of human to bat transmission of coronavirus could be severe. The primary concerns are that sustained infections could develop in wildlife populations that would harm wildlife and/or create a wildlife reservoir for SARS CoV 2.

3) Please be aware of landowners' concerns and safety in regards to Covid 19, and limit face to face interactions to a socially distanced, outdoor setting.

For some tips on safe caving practices during the pandemic, please see the Virginia Cave Owner's Newsletter from April, 2021:

<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/naturalheritage/document/vacaveownersnewsletterapr21.pdf>